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FY 2009 FOREIGN ASSISTANCE GOALS

Strong ties and cooperation between neighboring countries are proven to sustain region-wide stability, economic growth, and improved education. Promoting regional cooperation is a key U.S. policy goal in South and Central Asia. Ties however are weak, not only between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also among neighbors to the north and south constrained by distrust, past conflicts, and low levels of development. The South and Central Asia Bureau (SCA) is working with countries, the donor community, and international financial institutions to begin knitting the region together to strengthen interdependence and cooperation across borders in shared areas of need. These include improving higher education and workforce development opportunities, establishing or strengthening shared infrastructure, particularly energy transmission, and strengthening cross-border security. The Bureau regularly consults with country experts to develop ways forward through bilateral relations and through regional conferences and organizations such as the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Many U.S. programs leverage existing regional resources, skills, and institutions to support development needs in neighboring countries and create long-term ties.

HIGHLIGHTS BY PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

Peace and Security

Lack of integration and porous borders throughout South and Central Asia have allowed terrorist safe havens and narcotics trafficking to flourish, especially along Afghanistan's shared borders with the countries of South and Central Asia. This situation also hampers efforts to combat trafficking in persons and the spread of illegal arms and weapons of mass destruction. Counterterrorism programs equip participating border security guards and customs officers from South and Central Asia with the basic skills needed to detect, prevent, and prosecute trafficking in illicit materials. Enhancing security at the borders in this way facilitates a move away from illicit trafficking of weapons, narcotics, and other items to licit and productive trade and investment.

Programs discussed in this publication are funded through the Department of State. The U.S. Agency for International Development does not currently provide direct assistance to State South and Central Asia Regional.

In FY 2009, SCA regional funds facilitated:

- Regional training, in cooperation with the Department of Justice's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development and Training and the American Bar Association, for Central Asian officials on trade laws with a view to increasing criminal prosecution and imposition of administrative penalties, as well as improving case management
- Cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security to provide training and equipment to border guards and customs officials across the region to enhance capacity to interdict smugglers
- A July 2009 conference in Istanbul on International Export Controls in partnership with the Treasury Department. Senior officials from eight SCA countries attended. SCA also worked to establish Financial Intelligence Units across the region to combat money laundering and terrorist finance. This effort laid the groundwork for India, Kyrgyzstan, and Sri Lanka to join the international Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units.

Investing in People

The South and Central Asia region includes 13 countries with widely varying capacities to educate their citizens. The region also contains high caliber universities that often partner with U.S. institutions more frequently than with their neighboring countries. Extremism and regional instability, however, will pose threats as long as education remains at current low levels in much of South and Central Asia. Improving the capacity of the region's teachers and institutions, utilizing where possible the skills of local universities, is building the foundation for long-term business, diplomatic, cultural, and security ties between South and Central Asia, as well as personal and institutional relationships.

In FY 2009, SCA regional funds:

- Improved the quality of English language instruction by training 25 secondary school English teachers from each SCA country as master trainers. This eight-week program, implemented by the University of English and Foreign Languages in Hyderabad, India, instructed teachers on improved teaching techniques, and assisted them in conducting similar training when they returned to their home countries. In addition to learning new teaching methods and receiving exposure to the robust democracy and economy of India, the student teachers developed strong relationships with each other, and were exposed to Indian culture, as well as the cultures of their classmates from around the region. Fifty more English teachers will go through this program in 2010.
- Supported the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in the complex "self-study" process, a first step in obtaining U.S. accreditation, by funding a chief of staff position to shepherd the lengthy process. U.S. accreditation will better anchor AUCA as an institution of American-style liberal arts education within the region, drawing a larger number of students from both South and Central Asia. In FY 2009, several University policies and procedures, including admissions, plagiarism policies, and selection of majors, were re-evaluated by teams comprised of University administration, faculty, and students. Along with completing these evaluations, the University also agreed to enter into a partnership with Bard College in New York, a step towards full accreditation. AUCA will begin issuing joint

Bard degrees in shared majors. An expanded program of outreach and streamlined online application procedures were also designed and implemented in FY 2009.

Economic Growth

Infrastructure modernization and development is essential to integrate the South and Central Asia region economically. The “software” of technical expertise and regulatory reforms is also needed to ensure the countries of the region take full advantage of joint infrastructure. Energy in particular is a critical gap in all the countries’ development. South Asian countries cannot attract private sector investment and growth without energy resources, and without trading partners Central Asian states cannot build the requisite government and private-sector capacity for sale of its excess energy production capacity.

In FY 2009, SCA diplomatic support and regional funds:

- Supported progress toward a regional energy market involving the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. On November 16, 2007, the four governments entered into a Memorandum of Understanding for the development of a Central Asia-South Asian 1000 MW transmission Project. Technical assistance provided by the SCA regional program enabled progress this year by the Government of Pakistan (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan were supported by other donors and programs within the United States Government) to evaluate and develop positions on draft commercial agreements among the four countries.

Due to long-term instability and poverty in the South and Central Asia region, large segments of the adolescent population ages 15 to 24 have grown up without adequate education or job training. This “lost generation” of uneducated, disenfranchised youth are a ready and growing recruiting ground for Islamic extremists and terror organizations active in the SCA region. Parallel to this, economic growth in the region is limited, in part by the low-skilled workforce. Countries need skilled workforces to propel their growth and move beyond the unsustainable “race to the bottom” phenomenon occurring in the region, due to the low-skilled, low-wage labor pool.

In FY 2009, SCA regional funds:

- Trained 145 youth in freshwater prawn farming skills in Bangladesh. The district where the program took place was devastated by Cyclone Sydr in late 2007. Aquaculture is a growing industry in Bangladesh and labor is in demand. Many graduates of the program were placed in internships with local hatcheries. An additional 215 youth will be trained in 2010.
- Established a second, regional, workforce development program with the University of Central Asia involving Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The program will begin in 2010, and offer scholarships to 90 Afghan students to attend short courses at the Tajikistan campus on vocational and professional skills training. A market survey will first be conducted to identify the most appropriate courses for the Afghan students.